

Into the Time Labyrinth

By Peter David Smith

The human brain develops gradually during the years, so it is quite true to say that a person of twenty is thinking with a different brain than the one they had at age ten. A person of thirty is thinking with a different brain again. In some of us the brain development continues far beyond thirty.

When we remember our thoughts from various different times in our lives we are remembering with our “now” brain the thoughts and feelings of our “then” brain.

That was then, this is now and the other “that” is in the future. Our composite ego is able to move up and down the linear timeline of our development, but also along other linearities of speculative perceptions and ideas.

I remember sitting with Sandy, whom I called my girlfriend in spite of the fact that I was only one of her “boyfriends”, in a rather poorly attended dance in the Glastonbury Town Hall in 1973. We were joking and giggling about some nonsense or other while the sound system was playing “Stuck in the Middle with You” by Stealers Wheel when someone whom we didn’t know ran into the hall and he was wearing an old fashioned black tail coat exactly like the one I owned but was not wearing on that occasion.

“That’s exactly like my tail coat!” I exclaimed.

“That IS *thy* tail coat Petey dear!” giggled the vivacious 17 year old Sandy, who looked like Shirley MacLaine but talked like *Cider with Rosie*.

And so, of course, later that evening, I had to go to the shed where, with the permission of the owners Nancy and Gino Schiraldi, I stored my suitcases and belongings, full of comic books and clothing, to check that my formal black tail coat was still there. It was!!!

That black tail coat was the one I wore when doing my “Cosmic Capering” dance and my impressions of Groucho Marx. I was relieved to find the coat still there and it still had my orange flowery bowtie in the pocket. My identity was saved!

Sandy was completely open about her various boyfriends. She told me tales of them and probably mocked me when speaking to them. She certainly mocked me straight to my face all the time.

She told me about a man called Septimius who had a place in Silver Street. Septimius made jewellery. Sandy made me a gift of a large cross-shaped medallion Septimius had made for her. Moving forward in my mind to another time, a year or so in the future Sandy asked for that cross medallion back. But it was too late and I had already given it to someone else.

Moving up through the time labyrinth my memory is still showing me the black tail coat. But now the coat is a symbol of loss, a garment of mourning.

The coat was lost along the way and now reminds me of all the things I have lost. I remember the bonfire I made when instructed by my brainwashers to burn everything which connected me to my life before the Emin. Photographs of me as a child, me at school age, my certificates for bible study and for a full year’s attendance at school two years in a row. My old carnival style jokey clothing. My old letters and papers and writings and drawings. All gone. All gone. Up in flames.

Now I am falling back down through the timeline of my life. Back to the destruction of all my father’s work and dreams and hopes and earthly paradise. All destroyed by London when they expanded their borders and destroyed everything my dad and mum had built.

Now I am wandering the streets of the labyrinth. Over the hills and far away. Beyond the major tor and the minor tor. Along the shoreline and into the woods. Following where memory takes me, through mathematical structures and sculptural forms to swing sets and flowerbeds and peach trees and garden sheds.

And I remember all of those strange epileptic moments when my eyes rolled in their sockets and the blood rushed in my head. The moments when one part of my brain ran faster and one part of my brain ran slower. The fast part of the brain felt as though things were slowing down at the same time as the slow part of my brain felt that things were speeding up.

“I’m speeding up again!” exclaimed Sue, whom lovesick Baggins called “The Elf of the Elms”.

I remember when I got a job in the same boiler room where my dad had worked for 18 years. “You’ll do well if you’re here for 18 years like your dad!” said the foreman boss, agreeing to take me on trial for a while. But I only lasted a couple of weeks in that job and then went to work for the post office instead.

I remember that bus conductor on the 93 Routemaster route between North Cheam and Putney Bridge Station, the conductor who looked uncannily like Buddy Holly but with something odd in his appearance, as though he’d received a terrible permanent shell-shock or some unusual condition which had mercifully left him with the ability to calculate money and give the correct tickets.

I remember those two strange girls who passed me on an otherwise deserted street in Putney where one of them looked back at me after passing and shouted “I fukkin’ MIGHT!!!”

And I am falling/floating through the realms of the Yggdrasil morning night-time into the blue velvet darkness of temp perdue. We built beetles of colored plastic complete when they had all six legs and their antennae and, finally, their spiral proboscises which looked like plastic party horns/party blowers, the ones with a feather on the end.

The brain swings from the forces of crystallisation to the forces of plasticity as grey matter cells reduce in number and white matter cells increase.

I end up on an ATC orienteering exercise, slogging through the mud of Surrey on The Pilgrim’s Way in the rain. Map reading and up to our necks in muck and imaginary bullets. Me with metal, instrument of torture, metal insoles, flat feet and fallen arches for the correcting of.

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